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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes findings from a comprehensive evaluation of the Center for Family Life (CFL) in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, New York. CFL provides assessment and counseling, community-school programs, parent education workshops, adult employment programs, foster grandparent programs, neighborhood foster care programs, and a thrift shop. The evaluation examined CFL's origin, mission, services, participants, staff, and obstacles to success from 1993 to 1996. Data from surveys, interviews, and observations of a variety of CFL participants indicate that CFL leaders and staff have succeeded in translating much of its mission into operations. Results depict an institution that integrates various services and adapts to the changing needs of participating families. Parents, caregivers, and young people who spoke about their experiences with CFL typically endorsed the staff and their work and described a neighborhood institution that contributes to the well-being of community members of all ages. Interviews indicated that the CFL staff is committed to agency goals and approaches. Though only limited statistical analyses were possible on the effects of CFL programs on children and families, they indicate generally positive trends. The study notes considerable consensus among the groups closest to CFL (families, staff, and CFL leaders) about what the agency is and does. (SM)

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I was only expecting to find counseling here, like they would help me with the kids, but I didn't think they cared about me personally. I thought they would just care about my son ... because he's the one with the problem. But once we started going, they really helped me.

GOOD WORKS

Highlights of a Study on The Center for Family Life

By Susan Blank

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Through the Evaluation Grants Program, the Annie E. Casey Foundation funded comprehensive evaluations of exemplary family service programs' operations and outcomes. Evaluations were conducted collaboratively by program operators and independent research contractors. Agency staff members contributed to all phases of the study design, specification of outcomes, data collection and interpretation of findings. Collectively, these studies are intended to bring into focus the achievements and problems of programs that, although diverse, share the important characteristics of being preventive, collaborative, comprehensive and flexible.

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GOOD WORKS

Highlights of a Study on The Center for Family Life

By Susan Blank

JUNE 2000

THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION
EVALUATION GRANTS PROGRAM

Acknowledgments

This monograph summarizes findings and excerpts information from a comprehensive evaluation of the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park. The evaluation was collaboratively designed and implemented by the Center and three researchers from the Columbia University School of Social Work — Peg McCartt Hess, Brenda G. McGowan and Michael Botsko.

Findings from this study are published in:

- Hess, P.M., McGowan, B.G., and Botsko, M. (in press). *Preserving and Supporting Families Over Time: A Preventive Services Program Model.* Child Welfare.
- Hess, P.M., McGowan, B.G., and Meyer, C.H. (1996). "Practitioners' Perspectives on Family and Child Services." In *Children and Their Families in Big Cities.* A. Kahn and S. Kamerman, eds., New York: Columbia University School of Social Work, 121–37.
- Hess, P.M., McGowan, B.G., and Botsko, M. (forthcoming). *Nurturing the One, Supporting the Many: The Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, Brooklyn* (title tentative). Columbia University Press.

The Center for Family Life evaluation was conducted under a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

About the Author

Susan Blank is an independent consultant in New York City specializing in writing and editing on social policy issues. Previously she has been Associate Director of Planning and Program Development at Community Healthcare Network in New York City and Program Officer at the Foundation for Child Development.

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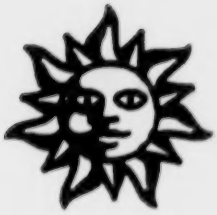
Dedicated to
Sister Mary Geraldine Tobia
1941–2000



A STUDY IN SERVICE

‹ I ›

I was only expecting to find counseling here, like they would help me with the kids, but I didn't think they cared about me personally. I thought they would just care about my son ... because he's the one with the problem. But once we started going, they really helped me. If you don't have a job, they help you. ... If you are a couple and you have problems, you can go there for counseling. And if you don't have food, they give you food.

— a woman from Sunset Park, Brooklyn, describing her experience with CFL

I am struck by how respectfully people are treated when they want help. People are given a first appointment right away, with no waiting time. No waiting time! I can't name another organization in child welfare that works that way.

— a New York City child welfare advocate, describing CFL

As reflected in these tributes — which are typical of many others from practitioners, public officials, parents and children in Sunset Park, Brooklyn — the Center for Family Life (CFL) is widely regarded as a family service agency of exceptional quality. One of the reasons CFL is so respected is that, as suggested by the mother quoted on the previous page, it does not follow a "set script" for delivering its services. Instead, the agency's programmatic responses are shaped to fit the needs of individual families.

Because CFL functions without a highly prescriptive, bureaucratic set of rules and regulations to cover every situation, describing its operations and outcomes can be difficult. But, as many policymakers, practitioners and others concerned with urban poverty point out, the qualities that make CFL hard to study also make it worthwhile to do so. Many reformers believe that for society to do a better job of promoting healthy development among poor children, we must look closely at the work of family agencies that are *dynamic, flexible and willing to address various needs as they arise*. Thus, observers familiar with CFL have persisted in asking for more detailed information: What exactly does CFL do, and how? What does the agency accomplish?

This report presents some answers to these questions. It summarizes and excerpts with permission findings from a larger study,[1] which was one of several produced recently by the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Evaluation Grants Program. In some sections of this report, information from the study is supplemented with findings from the recent Sunset Park Neighborhood Survey (see box, page 4).

Overall, the study confirms CFL's strong reputation, indicating that the agency's leaders and staff have succeeded in translating much of its ambitious mission into operations. Collectively, the study's surveys, interviews, observations and statistical data depict an institution that integrates various services and adapts to the changing needs of the families it serves. Parents, other caregivers and young people who spoke with researchers about their experiences with CFL typically endorsed the staff and their work and painted a picture of a neighborhood institution that contributes to the well-being of community members of all ages. Interviews indicated that the CFL staff is firmly committed to the agency's goals and approaches. While the scope of the study permitted only limited statistical analyses of the effects of CFL programs on children and families, these analyses indicated generally positive trends. The study also noted a high degree of consensus among the groups closest to CFL — families who use services, CFL staff and CFL leaders — about what the agency is and does.

CFL's Origins

CFL was founded in 1978 by Sisters Mary Paul and Geraldine, members of the Order of Sisters of the Good Shepherd, who co-direct the agency. Before they came to Sunset Park, both Sisters had accumulated extensive experience in other community and residential programs, and they wanted to use that

[1] P.M. Hess, B.G. McGowan, and M. Botsko. *Final Report of a Study of the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park: Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts*. New York, Columbia University School of Social Work, October 1997.

THE CENTER FOR FAMILY LIFE STUDY

Three researchers from the Columbia University School of Social Work — Peg McCartt Hess, Brenda G. McGowan and Michael Botsko — conducted the study of CFL. In designing the study, these scholars recognized that, although relatively small, CFL is a complex agency. Every week, a wide variety of CFL-sponsored activities — ranging from parents' therapy groups and after-school programs to work readiness training and arts programs — take place throughout Sunset Park.

TO TRY TO CAPTURE THE FULL EXPERIENCE OF CFL AND ITS WORK, THE RESEARCHERS BEGAN WITH A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS:

- How did CFL originate? Why did it develop along the lines it did?
- How are CFL's mission and philosophy defined and perceived by administrators, staff, volunteers, clients, community residents and others? In what ways are CFL's mission and philosophy translated into different programs?
- What services are offered, and what approaches are used to deliver them?
- What are the participation levels for various services?
- What are the key characteristics of participants?
- How do participants, workers and volunteers experience the services?
- How is CFL organized, managed and staffed? How are organizational cohesion and morale sustained?
- How are accomplishments and client outcomes evaluated?
- How do client outcomes relate to the "inputs" of services? Which services and approaches most effectively facilitate growth and change for particular groups of clients? Which ones have little impact?
- How does CFL contribute to community growth and development in Sunset Park?
- What obstacles does CFL encounter in attempting to offer comprehensive, developmental, family-focused services, especially considering that public policies and funding streams generally favor highly targeted, problem-focused, remedial services to individuals at risk?

The study designed to answer these questions was extensive, lasting three years, from 1993 to 1996. Also, in keeping with CFL's diverse service offerings, the study looked at the agency through a variety of lenses. In addition to the background information gathered on CFL's history and services, research encompassed substudies of:

- CFL's "core" Preventive Service Program, including an analysis of program experiences and outcomes for a sample of 189 families in the program;
- several interrelated programs for youth and community development; and
- activities that support parent, family and community development (the Advocacy Clinic, Emergency Food Program and Employment Services Program).

The Sunset Park
NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEY

Between 1998 and 1999, the Annie E. Casey Foundation sponsored a survey of Sunset Park residents to gather information that would support CFL program operations and provide a portrait of the surrounding neighborhood. CFL staff helped design the survey and managed its administration with technical assistance from Metis Associates, a research and evaluation consulting firm. Thirty-minute interviews were conducted in English, Spanish and Cantonese with 266 randomly selected Sunset Park residents by trained community residents. The survey, which was not limited to CFL clients, covered areas of Sunset Park that were chosen carefully to ensure that the sample would be as representative as possible of the community's overall population. In each of 400 randomly selected households, interviewers attempted to speak with one adult, age 18 or older, who cared for at least one child under age 18 who also was living in that household.

knowledge to develop a new, comprehensive, neighborhood-based family service agency.

Despite the flexible, nonbureaucratic style of the organization, the process that led to its establishment was by no means casual. Rather, CFL was a product of careful planning and study. To help decide where the new agency would be based and how its services would meet the needs of Sunset Park, the Sisters consulted extensively with community leaders. Also, before CFL opened its doors, Sister Geraldine canvassed Sunset Park homes for six months, talking with as many people as possible about the needs of their families and community.

The Neighborhood

Located about a half-hour by subway from downtown Manhattan, in the shadow of the Gowanus Expressway and near the industrial Brooklyn waterfront, Sunset Park is a neighborhood contending with major problems. In addition to economic hardship, residents face a marked shortage of adequate housing, severe overcrowding in schools, crime and drug dealing. Another cluster of social problems — although not as acute as in some comparable neighborhoods — is reflected in the rates of births to teens (13 percent of all births in the neighborhood in 1996), infant mortality (seven per 1,000 in 1996) and low-birthweight infants (8 percent of infants in 1996).[2] (See profile, page 6, for additional statistical information on Sunset Park.)

Despite these problems, Sunset Park has many riches. These include a remarkably diverse popula-

[2] *Keeping Track of New York City's Children*, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, 1999.

tion; a large number of small businesses, many family owned and operated; and a communal vigor demonstrated in the thousands of volunteer hours that residents donate each year to schools, churches and agencies such as CFL.

An important indication of the community's positive qualities emerged from the survey of Sunset Park residents, who generally reported high levels of satisfaction with the neighborhood. However, compared to respondents' high ratings of satisfaction, their ratings of the neighborhood as a place of civic engagement — for example, as a place where people "get together to solve a community problem" — were much lower. These findings help illuminate the backdrop against which CFL conducts the advocacy and community development work described later in this section.

Profile: The Agency

The family service agency that emerged from the planning process in 1978 defined its clientele, as it does today, as all families with children under 18 or with a pregnant woman, living in Sunset Park, Brooklyn.[3] In fiscal year 1996–97, the last year for which data are available, CFL programs were budgeted at $3,158,146. At that time, staff totaled 120, including 57 full-time personnel and 63 part-time personnel (part-time staff were used mainly in the school-based programs). There were roughly equal numbers of white (27) and Hispanic (22) personnel on the full-time staff, with smaller numbers of black (4) and Asian (2) personnel. Hispanics made up more than two-thirds of the part-time staff.

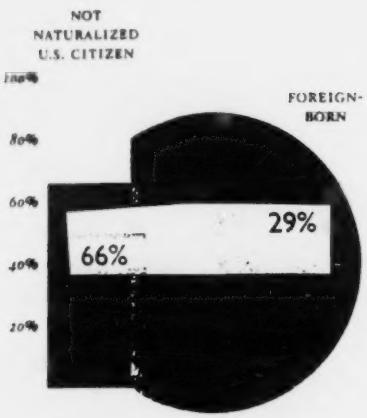
It should be noted that the total staff figures do not reflect the full scope of resources needed to run the agency. CFL operates as a satellite program of St. Christopher-Ottilie Children's Services, a larger family service institution that provides key administrative services for CFL, such as billing, accounting and human resource management. Despite these administrative benefits of affiliation, CFL is autonomous in its program development, hiring and professional practices.

For fiscal year 1996–97, about 65 percent of CFL funding came from public sources, primarily from three New York City government agencies — the Child Welfare Administration (now the Administration of Children's Services), the Department of Youth and Community Services, and the Department of Employment. Smaller amounts of funding came from the state's Nutrition Assistance Program and Department of Labor. The balance of funding, 35 percent, came from more than 41 foundations, corporations and individuals — a noteworthy proportion of private funding for an organization with no endowment.

[3] A few programs, such as the Employment Program, also serve clients who are not Sunset Park residents.

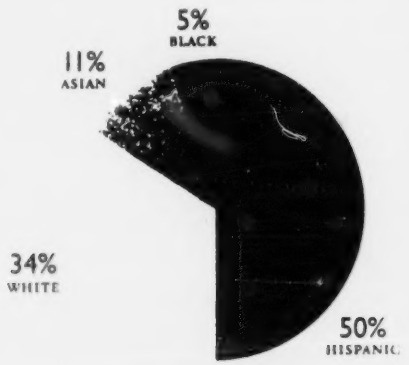
SUNSET PARK: FACTS AND FIGURES[4]

1990 population: 102,565



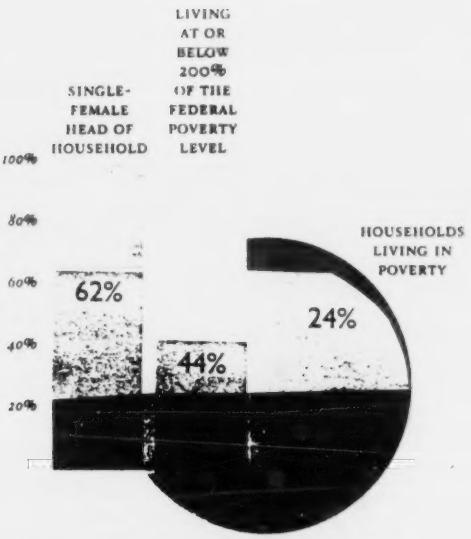
CITIZENSHIP, 1990

29 percent are foreign-born; of these 29 percent, 66 percent are not naturalized U.S. citizens



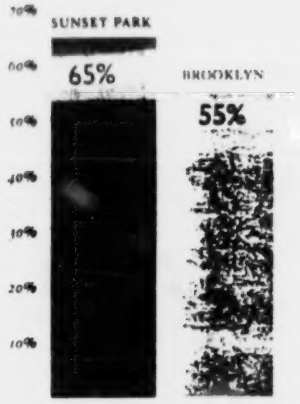
ETHNIC BACKGROUND, 1990

50 percent are Hispanic; 34 percent are white (non-Hispanic); 11 percent are Asian, Pacific Islander or Native American (almost all in this group are Chinese); 5 percent are black (non-Hispanic)



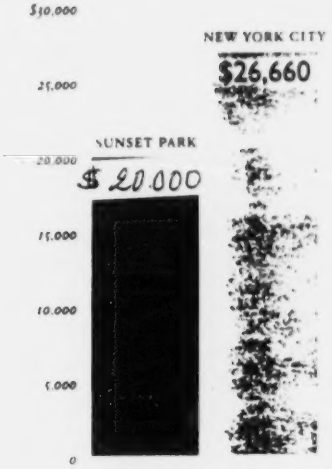
HOUSEHOLDS IN POVERTY, 1990

24 percent of households are living in poverty; of these, 62 percent are headed by single females, and 44 percent are estimated to be living at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level



RATE OF BIRTH INTO POVERTY, 1991

Sunset Park has the sixth highest birth into poverty rate among Brooklyn's 18 community districts



MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME, 1993

Median family income: $20,000; New York City median family income: $26,660

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[4]Sources: 1. *Keeping Track of New York City's Children*, 1995. 2. *Socioeconomic Profiles: A Portrait of New York City's Community Districts from the 1980 & 1990 Censuses of Population and Housing*. City of New York, Department of City Planning, March 1993. 3. *1990 Census: Population by Age, Sex & Mutually Exclusive Race, Part 1: Total Population for New York City, Boroughs and Community Districts*. New York City Department of City Planning, Population Division, January 1995.

CFL'S MAIN SERVICES

Following is a summary of
the Center for Family Life services and activities:

Assessment and Counseling

- In-person availability of social work professionals from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m., seven days a week. For people with special emergencies, availability by telephone of CFL co-directors, who live on the premises, from 11 p.m. to 8 a.m.
- Individualized assessments, including psychological and psychiatric evaluations.
- Counseling, including individual, group and family counseling; family life education; women's support groups; and therapeutic and activity groups for children, teens and parents.
- Help in addressing children's school problems and learning disabilities, including collaborative efforts of CFL social workers and school personnel.
- Infant/Toddler/Parent Program, including stimulation and group play for infants and toddlers, as well as support and parenting groups for mothers.[5]

Community School Program

- After-school programs for children ages five to 12. Located in two elementary schools and a middle school. The programs are operated by paid staff, with the help of teens in CFL's Counselor-in-Training Program. Activities include drama, dance, arts and crafts, sports and games, homework help, language arts and club/discussion sessions.
- Five summer day camps for children ages five to 15.
- An extended-day program at Dewey Middle School that offers after-school activities in performing and creative arts.
- Community service club for preteens and teens who volunteer in the Sunset Park after-school programs and elsewhere in the community. Activities include mentoring/academic support; family life and sex education groups; socialization activities; and family recreation activities, such as a family camping weekend.
- Two Teen Evening Centers, which open schools to teens for sports, discussion groups and creative arts activities.
- The Summer Youth Employment Program, funded by the New York City Department of Employment, which provides a combination of paid work experience, education and support services to young people ages 14 to 21. In summer 1996, the program included 50 work sites, enrolling 628 Sunset Park teens.[6]

Parent Education Workshops

- Workshops on topics related to raising children and sustaining families. Workshops are held mainly in schools; are open to all parents in the community, regardless of whether they participate in other CFL components; and are offered in English, Cantonese and Spanish.

Adult Employment Program

- Services that include English-as-a-Second-Language education, computer training and job-placement services for about 250 clients a year.

Foster Grandparent Program

- Program linking CFL counselors with senior neighborhood residents to provide in-home parenting assistance and support to families.

Neighborhood Foster Care Program

- Foster-care service placing Sunset Park children with neighborhood families, with the goal of reunifying children with their birth families. Foster families mentor and support birth parents. Contact between the birth parents and child is encouraged and supported.

CFL's Storefront Center

- A thrift shop, which is a nonprofit outlet for distributing used clothing, household supplies and furnishings free of charge or at very low prices;
- CFL's Advocacy Clinic, which helps residents secure access to public benefits; and
- An Emergency Food Program that is sponsored by a consortium of agencies, including CFL.

[5]Added in 1982. Suspended in 1998 — after the period of study — because most mothers who might have been available for the program in the past had been called in to participate in welfare-to-work activities.

[6]In 1998, CFL added a year-round school-to-work program to its youth services.

PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE: MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY II

Led by its co-founders for more than 20 years, CFL maintains a strong and distinct philosophy. One important principle at CFL is that the family is the unit of treatment. Through such practices as providing employment training services to parents of children who are in after-school programs or involving grandparents in the schooling activities of children, CFL often strives to serve multiple members and generations of a family simultaneously. Thus, depending on what needs emerge, CFL may work with an individual family member, a group of family members or the family as a whole.

Staff members frequently *combine clinical social work with practical problem solving*. "From one case to the next," says a preventive service worker, "it's almost 100 percent sure that I'm going to be relying on the director of the [CFL] Employment Center, or I'm going to be calling a center staff member in the school." Or, in the words of another preventive service worker, "We are not doing just counseling and psychotherapy, with clients walking into the office and meeting once a week."

In the same vein, staff members stress *the inseparability of clinical social work and advocacy*. Advocacy permeates many aspects of CFL's work. The CFL Advocacy Clinic specializes in helping clients get access to public benefits. In addition, social workers throughout the agency are quick to advocate on behalf of and with clients to ensure that they receive the benefits to which they are entitled. One staff member who counsels families says that her role encompasses concern for the neighborhood. She says that part of her responsibility is making sure Sunset Park children do not live in a community so bereft of supports that they are consigned to foster care.

Beyond advocating for individuals, program directors routinely respond to new public policies or procedures that pose threats to clients' rights or well-being; often, they respond by bringing these issues to the attention of public officials and educat-

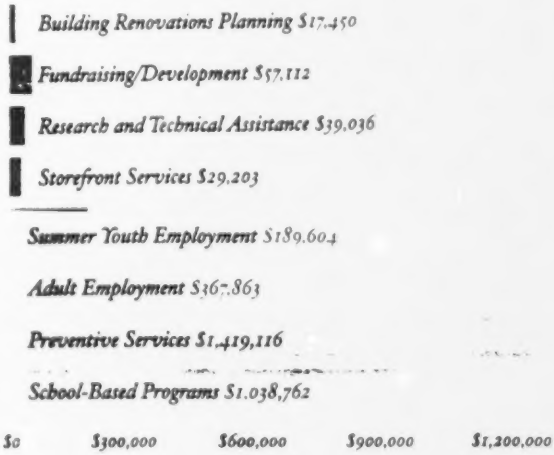
ing them about the implications of their decisions. For example, Sister Mary Paul has become well known in the child welfare community for her timely and forceful letters challenging practices that can damage families, such as government reporting requirements that pose risks to confidentiality.

Staff members are invited to participate in advocacy efforts. As suggested by one CFL staff meeting — where personnel signed up for various advocacy teams, each of which was to address a specific new public policy that could have a negative impact on clients — CFL staff work includes taking action on public policy issues.

Another important feature of the CFL approach is to *form working partnerships with families*. An after-school program for parents during the 1993–94 school year provides one illustration. In the first of nine workshops focusing on parenting challenges, parents were asked to identify topics they wished to explore. Rather than merely using that information to make their own plans for the series, CFL staff scheduled additional monthly joint-planning meetings to involve parent volunteers in setting dates, selecting topics and choosing speakers. Remarking on CFL's partnership approach to services, Barbara B. Blum, a former commissioner of the New York State Department of Social Services and former president of the Foundation for Child Development, notes, CFL's leaders know that "you have to listen to what a family says, rather than having your own opinions or just using what's available."

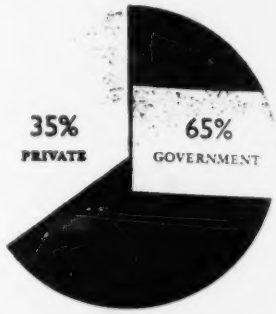
Consistent with this family partnership approach, CFL *avoids defining its services as problem-oriented*. Sisters Mary Paul and Geraldine have refused to take any kind of categorical funding or use any categorical terminology that labels families in terms of problems. Hand in hand with this commitment to avoid stigmatizing families, according to Sister Mary Paul, is an effort to alleviate families' "sense of victimization" by "constantly learning about the possibilities of people and helping them recognize and realize those possibilities more fully."

CFL Budget, Fiscal Year 1996–97



Total Budget $3,158,146

CFL Funding Sources, Fiscal Year 1996–97



Government, 65 percent; private, 35 percent

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CFL also places priority on *belonging to the community*. For a family service agency, one basic prerequisite of neighborhood engagement is simply "being there." CFL has made services available to families around the clock over a period of many years. Strong evidence suggests that this availability translates into a high level of neighborhood awareness about CFL's services. One indication is the large number of self-referrals to CFL programs; another is a recent survey of Sunset Park teens showing that half were familiar with CFL.

AN IMPORTANT GUIDING PRINCIPLE FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IS A FOCUS ON ISSUES THAT AFFECT THE WHOLE COMMUNITY AND THAT ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO WORK TOGETHER.

In addition, it is worth noting that respondents to the Sunset Park Neighborhood Survey generally spoke positively about social networks in the community (agreeing, for example, with statements such as, "Adults in this neighborhood know who the local children are" and "There are adults in this neighborhood that children can look up to.") CFL's work may well be contributing to this sense of cohesion.

Most impressively, survey findings show that almost two-thirds of residents (63 percent) knew of CFL, and of those who did, 88 percent viewed the agency as very important to the community. Anecdotally, interviewers noted that respondents not only were aware of and approved of CFL but also could speak specifically about programs, services, activities or events through which the agency had touched their lives or the lives of friends and family. In a community of more than 100,000 residents, it is striking to find this level of familiarity with a single nonprofit agency.

Almost certainly, this reputation depends not only on the availability of services but also on being attuned to neighborhood needs. One sign of this strength is the agency's sensitivity to the community's ethnic composition. Over the years, CFL has made steady increases in staffing among Hispanic and Chinese professionals and community residents and has increased outreach to the neighborhood's growing Chinese population. Moreover, CFL has been willing to take on unusual roles for a family service agency — for example, pursuing community development work and assisting with employment and training — when expanding in these directions promised to benefit the community.

CFL is *deeply engaged in many community development activities*. The director of CFL's Storefront Center plays a lead role in these efforts, representing the agency in the Sunset Park Emergency Food Program, the Children's Corner (a local group that focuses on welfare issues), and the local community board's Human Services Cabinet (which CFL helped to establish) and Sweatshop Task Force. Staff members in CFL's Community Schools Program often take part in community development activities related to parent and youth education and organizing. For example, when federal funding for youth

programs was threatened, CFL helped organize a daylong, citywide conference to educate teens about the issue and give them opportunities to inform elected officials about youths' needs.

An important guiding principle for community development is *a focus on issues that affect the whole community and that encourage people to work together, rather than getting caught up in issues that divide*. Examples of such CFL community development projects include seeking federal "enterprise zone funding" for Sunset Park, securing Annenberg Foundation funding for arts education at a local school, sponsoring and recruiting participants for a program offering free legal services to immigrants, and protesting the reconstruction of a superhighway that poses environmental threats to the neighborhood and divides it geographically.

In working to belong to the community, CFL also must grapple with certain tensions. For example, the agency's highly focused mission and philosophy, readily articulated by strong-minded CFL professionals, may require staff to make extra efforts to listen receptively to outside suggestions and criticism. Another tension, mentioned by some neighborhood residents, arises from the agency's lack of top-level Hispanic leadership. Despite the strong representation of Hispanics on CFL's staff, there has been no opportunity to recruit Hispanics for senior management positions for many years because of the longevity of current senior staff, who, with the exception of the director of the Employment Program and a coordinator of one of the Community School Programs, are not Hispanic.

WITH A LARGE SHARE OF STAFF MEMBERS POSSESSING MASTER'S DEGREES IN SOCIAL WORK, CFL PLACES A HIGH PREMIUM ON EMPLOYING TRAINED PROFESSIONAL STAFF WITH A STRONG KNOWLEDGE BASE.

In addition to other features of CFL's institutional identity, the agency operates with a *distinctive view of what it means to be a professional*. With a large share of staff members possessing master's degrees in social work, CFL places a high premium on employing trained professional staff with a strong knowledge base. According to Sister Mary Paul, key kinds of knowledge that CFL professionals should have include knowledge of child development and family relationships, knowledge of the psychological bases of relationships, and knowledge of the community and its ecology.

CFL professionalism also emphasizes *planning and assessing before taking action*. Sister Geraldine describes a planning process early in CFL's work:

> "First, neighborhood needs, as articulated by caseworkers and community workers, were listed on paper. Staff then went on to list resources — both those already available and those yet to be developed — that would be required to meet those needs. Listening respectfully and receptively to clients is central to this needs assessment process — and, indeed, to all aspects of CFL's work."

CFL professionals maintain *a developmental focus in relationships with clients*. For example, the agency

places value on long-term relationships with clients. Reflecting that outlook, one staff member recalls her 15-year tenure at CFL and notes, "Some of the kids I met in that first year have grown into CFL staff."

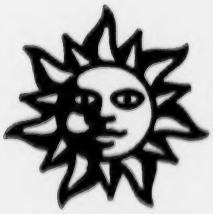
Another outgrowth of this developmental approach is CFL's emphasis on fostering clients' creativity. CFL's community arts events and the centrality of arts programs to its after-school programs underscore the agency's emphasis on helping people express their talents and aspirations, regardless of their economic circumstances.

Observers have commented that other, less tangible qualities seem to be central to CFL's way of doing business, though these qualities sometimes are hard to define. One such quality is a shared sense of mission among staff members that many observers find impressive. In interviews, staff members consistently identified the CFL mission, philosophy and program model as elements that draw them to the agency and support them in their ongoing work. Similarly, researchers concluded that CFL's guiding principles are broadly understood and valued by clients and staff. As evidence, researchers cite the striking consistency between formal program data collected for the study and written and verbal descriptions of CFL's work by leadership, staff and family members participating in services. In short, people are doing what they say they are doing, and this organizational authenticity is in itself a significant finding.

The Role of CFL's Co-Directors

The leadership of Sisters Mary Paul and Geraldine has shaped CFL's mission and programs. The Sisters' residence on the top floor of CFL's main facility and their seven-day-a-week accessibility over many years have kept them immersed in CFL's activities. One potential problem with this close daily connection is that the agency's core lieutenants, many of whom have the skills and experience to ably run an agency, have few opportunities for promotion at CFL. Over the next five years, it could become important for the Sisters to develop a strategy — such as a training rotation among existing staff members or a broader pool of social workers — to prepare potential successors to fill their top leadership roles.

Few other organizational leaders in New York City have persisted on their own terms as vigorously, as successfully or for as long as the Sisters. In addition to refusing to accept categorical funding, Sisters Mary Paul and Geraldine have taken pains to control CFL's size and focus carefully on developing high-priority programs.



THE CENTER FOR FAMILY LIFE AT WORK: A CLOSER VIEW OF SERVICES

III

[My counselor] wasn't stuck up, she wasn't stuffy. She was very open-minded. I felt I didn't belong there, but she said, "You belong with this family." That's the message I got. Without her saying even two words, it was like: "Welcome to the family."

— a parent who received CFL family counseling services

When I had my newborn, I had no income and I was homeless. ... [Then] I got an apartment. I was in a very stressful situation where I had no food, no Pampers, no carriage, no crib. ... The ladies in the support group knew what I was going through, so they all chipped in and got me some Pampers, clothes, crib sheets and a carriage. I went to the [CFL] thrift shop and got a shopping bag of food, and that held me over until I could stand on my feet.

— a parent in a CFL mother's support group

Every once in a while, there's a call over the weekend and maybe an extra session we need to have in the home of a client. ... [We emphasize] flexibility and willingness not just to be here on site but to go out into the community.

— a CFL social worker

Family Counseling Services

Family counseling services, a core activity of CFL since its founding, provide a window into the way the agency works. Over the two-year period from 1994 through 1995, nearly 600 families participated in CFL's Preventive Program, the umbrella program for family counseling. This section focuses on the activities and service pathways that this program offers to families (see box on page 16 for descriptions of the study methods and study group).

Paths to the Program

In New York City, the term "preventive services" commonly refers to services that various city agencies provide to families to help prevent unnecessary foster care. Indeed, many families who use CFL's Preventive Program — 16 percent of the study group — are sent there by the city's child welfare agency. These parents typically are assumed to be the target group for such programs. For some, participation is a condition of avoiding foster care, although parents cannot be required to enroll. Similarly, some parents are sent to the program by family court or parole officers.

For other families, however, the decision to enroll is purely voluntary. In fact, self-referral was the second-most common way that families in the study sample entered the program.

CFL's accessibility to both self-referred families and families that might not come without an outside impetus is a result of the agency's reluctance to categorize certain programs as appropriate only for certain families. CFL meets family needs largely on a case-by-case basis, through a variety of interventions. Thus, it is not surprising that, while most Preventive Program families are new to CFL when they enroll, a sizeable minority already has used other CFL services.

While most CFL services accept participants in an open enrollment style, the Preventive Program uses a standard intake interview as an entry point for families. The interview is arranged with minimal delay after a family expresses interest. Many study group families — one out of every eight — were scheduled for a session on the same day they contacted the program, and fully half had an appointment to meet within four days of first contact. As an important sign of the program's family-centered approach to assessing a new case, all family members are invited to the intake session. Perhaps not surprisingly, biological mothers in the study group almost always attended. What is striking is the high proportion of other family members — half of children and grandparents and about a third of male caregivers — who also attended the interview.

Family Needs and Characteristics

In the Preventive Program, a "family" can take many different forms. Among families in the study group, just over half had two caregivers living in the household, and almost half had a single caregiver, usually the biological mother. Forty percent of families had biological fathers living at home, and 6 percent had neither biological parent living with the children. Some families with multiple care-

givers were reconstituted, headed by various combinations of relatives, nonrelatives or adoptive caregivers. A large majority of caregivers (80 percent) were Hispanic. The balance of the group consisted of smaller proportions of white, black, Asian and mixed-race caregivers.

Families in the study group ranged in size from two to 11 members. Collectively, the 189 study group families contained 423 children. Contrary to some stereotypes about families in low-income neighborhoods, the average number of children living in a household — 2.3 — was not particularly large. With just over half the families on public assistance, many clearly were struggling to make ends meet.

Families come to the program for help, but how badly do they need it? And for what reasons? Interviews reveal some concerns, and more unfold as families spend time in the program. Assessment records for the study group tell a story of families facing diverse and often serious issues. At the outset of families' association with the program, problems among caregivers and children were the most frequently identified difficulty (60 percent of families), followed by child-centered problems such as school and behavior problems (41 percent) and conflict among adults (36 percent). Domestic violence was identified as a problem among a quarter of the families. The mix of issues that surfaced in intake interviews shows that, rather than defining a case in terms of only a parent or only a child, the program is serious about assessing the needs of the entire family.

Over time, study group families revealed needs and problems that were extensive, complex and significantly linked to poverty. For example, during the 30-month study period, counselors identified nearly two-thirds of the families at least once as having problems that were serious enough to require immediate intervention to prevent having a child placed outside the home. Similarly, one out of every 10 study group children had been in foster care at some point.

Counselors' records show that the most common difficulties among caregivers were emotional problems (77 percent of caregivers), followed by physical health problems (40 percent) and developmental problems (11 percent). More than two-thirds of children had emotional problems, and almost two-thirds had behavioral problems. The third-most frequently identified problem among children was a learning disability.

The Preventive Program

Counseling

The Preventive Program is operated by an equivalent of about 18 full-time staff (some counselors are full-time; some work part-time in other CFL programs). Sisters Mary Paul and Geraldine and two supervisors oversee the clinical casework, and the staff is expanded by about eight social work interns during the academic year. Caseload size for a full-time counselor averages 15 families.

One important feature of the staff is its high degree of professional social work training. Almost all counselors in the program hold master's degrees in social work. Although there is some turnover, continuity of service is very strong. In 1997, more

STUDY OF FAMILIES IN THE PREVENTIVE PROGRAM

Researchers gathered a great deal of information on families' experiences in the Preventive Program through a study of a sample of the families enrolled between November 15, 1993, and May 15, 1995 — in all, the study looks at 189 families, called the "study group" in this report. Researchers analyzed information on the Family Assessment Form filled out by each family's counselor at the outset of the case and subsequently at six-month intervals. Researchers and CFL staff members made slight modifications to the original form, which was developed by the Children's Bureau of Los Angeles (McCroskey, Nishimoto & Subramanian, 1991) and which assesses family strengths as well as problems. In addition, researchers designed an instrument to collect data on families' needs for and use of services. To enrich information on the study group, researchers also examined service use patterns among all families enrolled in the program at any point during the time when computerized service data were available for CFL, and researchers conducted interviews with selected program participants and staff members. Finally, as described in more detail later in this section, at regular intervals, counselors assessed the functioning and circumstances of caregivers, children and families in the study group using measures provided by the Family Assessment Form.

than 70 percent of counselors had been with the program for more than three years.

Inside the Preventive Program

Following the intake interview, a family is assigned to a single counselor. Together, the counselor and family members articulate goals and a service plan to reach these goals. Vesting responsibility for a case in one individual is important to CFL. "We do not split tasks of therapy from what is sometimes relegated to something called 'case management,'" writes Sister Mary Paul. Counselors are prepared to provide clinical services to the family, but they also are expected to connect family members to other services that might help the family move in positive directions. Not surprisingly, given this commitment to "doing what it takes" to help clients, the program also offers families the option of long-term participation, so that counselors and families have considerable discretion about when cases are closed and for what reasons.

A review of the Preventive Program's policies and practices suggests that it mainly aims to blend:

- individual, family and group counseling, services historically provided by clinical social workers and
- community-based family support services.

Of course, programs that hold such intentions do not always manage to translate them into operating realities. How does the Preventive Program's model play out in day-to-day operations? Answering that question is challenging, because participation patterns in an intervention program such as the

Preventive Program are often dense and intricate. Even a long study period may not be enough to cover the full story of a particular family's participation experience. In fact, this 30-month study period turned out to be too brief to report fully on the service patterns of more than 50 percent of study group families, who were still participating when the study ended. But along with interviews of participants and staff members, the study reveals a great deal about how the Preventive Program is experienced by the families who use it and the counselors who work with them.

The program delivers on a number of its operational promises. There are strong indications that the program's clinical contacts with families are frequent and individualized and that, in addition to providing counseling, the program creates a service-rich environment for families.

Study group families enrolled in the Preventive Program from between one month and 30 months over the 30-month study period had an average of 42 clinical contacts (ranging from three to 229) with counselors. On average, a counselor made eight home visits to a family during the study. The range of numbers of visits — from none to 50 — suggests that in some instances, counselors met frequently with families in their homes. Of course, for a single parent without child care, a family with an ill child or a family unable to come to CFL offices for any other reason, home visits ease the burden of staying in contact with the program. In addition, as one counselor points out, the home visit can provide "a way of reconnecting" to the program for a client who is experiencing frustration, depression or other difficulties. Besides home visits, staff schedules show that counselors work at least two evenings a week, providing many opportunities for families to stay in touch with them.

As with counseling, families' use of other services was high. Over the study period, study group families were involved in an average of five services at CFL (most often in school-related parent programs, summer day camp, after-school child care, youth recreation and development programs, and the Summer Youth Employment Program) and four services elsewhere.

The wide range of activities available to families helps confirm that the program lives up to its intention of avoiding a "one-size-fits-all" approach. There is broad variation both in how the program serves individual families and in the experiences of families over time. The frequency and location of counselors' meetings with family members vary, as do the particular constellations of family members involved in sessions. Forms of counseling — individual, group, marital or family — also vary, and families vary in the number and kinds of services they use both inside and outside CFL. Furthermore, for at least a fifth of study group families, participation during the study period was a return to the program, not a first contact. The fact that many families choose to return is another indication of CFL's client-centered approach to services.

The variety of the Preventive Program's ways of operating might leave clients and staff members wondering whether any particular ingredient of

intervention is a "must" for making it work. In fact, interviews with clients and staff members consistently suggested that the helping relationship between a single counselor and a family is an essential characteristic of the intervention.

When asked to describe important characteristics of that relationship, clients and staff members mentioned the active participation of family members in the counseling process, the focus on families' strengths as well as difficulties, and counselors' respect for family members. Asked to characterize how her counselor treats her, one client said: "Like my equal person." "I always felt that the counselor was very open and nonjudgmental," said another. "You feel that people are judging you because you are referred by an agency. She was not judgmental." An adolescent client stressed the related theme of autonomy: "It was what I wanted to do. ... If I wanted to meet with the family, we met with the family. If I wanted to meet by myself, we met by myself. ... She gives you advice. If you want to take it, you take it."

SISTERS MARY PAUL AND GERALDINE "LET YOU DO YOUR JOB. YOU DON'T HAVE ANYONE ON YOUR BACK TELLING YOU WHAT TO DO OR CHECKING ON YOU. THEY KNOW YOU'RE DOING THE BEST YOU CAN."

If the counselor-client relationship is genuinely nonjudgmental, we would expect to find that counselors do not use elaborate diagnostic categories to define each case. In-depth interviews with counselors indicate that their approach to the relationship is indeed quite free of categorical judgments. Counselors who identified "types" of cases mainly referred not to diagnostic labels for problems, but to "short-term" and "long-term" cases — a basic distinction reflected in actual patterns of service use. Also, consistent with this reluctance to use categories to describe cases, none of the counselors interviewed said that a specific service plan or program could be applied to all families with a particular problem.

Counselor interviews also produced a picture of a staff deeply engaged in its work. The counselors value the autonomy they are given in the program. Sisters Mary Paul and Geraldine "let you do your job," said one counselor. "You don't have anyone on your back telling you what to do or checking on you. They know you're doing the best you can." Another counselor describes how she and her colleagues interpret their authority to determine how they approach cases: "We have the goal of trying to keep families together, but we don't have a strict guideline that says I must see the child, I must see the mother, or I must see the family together. ... To get the work done, we can use any intervention we feel comfortable with."

Of course, in offering counselors freedom to make their own decisions, the program must guard against leaving them isolated or unsupported, a problem that is especially important to avoid, given the many pressures of their work. Counselors cite difficulties with quantities of paperwork, low

salaries, concerns about personal safety and obstacles in connecting clients to services. Counselors' relationships with families, however satisfying, carry significant stresses. Concerns include the unpredictability, even volatility, of some relationships; the enormity of needs facing many families; and the strong sense of responsibility that counselors feel, especially when they seek to prevent the placement of children in foster care.

But counselors also say they do not feel alone in facing these challenges. Rather, the independence they are given is balanced by support from supervisors and colleagues. "What helps me with the cases where I worry," one counselor observed, "is supervision and talking with other staff. ... My supervisor might be worrying with me about a particular case. ... Or other staff members may have had a similar case in the past and say, 'This is what I did, this is how I handled that.'" Interviews suggest that, even as they struggle to assist families with severe problems, staff members feel hopeful, effective and proud of the work they do collectively.

When asked what qualities it takes to work successfully in the program, counselors put the highest premium on flexibility — "being able to adapt and pitch in and change," as one counselor put it. They also consistently identified the importance of commitment to CFL's mission, to its holistic vision of providing services, to clients and to the concept of the family as the unit of service.

INTERVIEWS SUGGEST THAT STAFF MEMBERS FEEL HOPEFUL, EFFECTIVE AND PROUD OF THE WORK THEY DO COLLECTIVELY.

Preventive Program Outcomes

The Preventive Program seeks to prevent out-of-home placement for children and, more generally, to help the family function better. It is difficult to measure a program's effectiveness in reaching these goals. Ideally, we would like to know what the program achieved beyond what would have happened without intervention. The best way to study that is through an experimental design that compares outcomes for two groups of similar families, one offered the program and the other denied services. Due in part to financial limitations, logistical considerations and ethical concerns about turning away families who are seeking help, it was not possible to study the Preventive Program with this kind of controlled experiment.

Nevertheless, the detailed Family Assessment Forms that counselors filled out on families shed light on the extent to which the program is making a positive impact on families, and there are several indicators that the program is working. Significantly, records show that 88 percent of the service needs of study group families cited by counselors were addressed by the time the study ended.

The Family Assessment Forms also made it possible to compare counselors' assessments of how families were doing at the beginning and end of the study period. Counselors gave families initial and final scores for 18 different measures. Eight measures were related to the children (for example, behavioral difficulties,

developmental difficulties and indicators of maturity), six were related to caregivers (for example, parent-child interaction and caregivers' self-esteem), and four were related to the overall environment of the family (home environment, community environment, financial stress and social support).

Over the course of the study, significant improvements were recorded for five of the eight measures of children's well-being. Children showed improvement in the areas of behavioral difficulties, developmental difficulties, emotional disturbances, relating difficulties and learning difficulties. Almost all the positive results that were seen occurred for children, however, as family and environmental factors appeared to be impervious to intervention. It is not clear why. One fact about the analysis to bear in mind is that no data were available for the intensity of service delivered to each family member. It is possible, for instance, that more children than caregivers were involved in activities that involve frequent attendance, such as daily after-school activities, and that this difference affected the results. It is also possible that counselors were more apt to observe changes in children than in adults.

While it would be useful to have more information that would help measure the results of the prevention program on the whole family, the findings on child-centered factors should be given the weight they deserve. These findings strongly suggest that CFL's comprehensive services effectively address children's difficulties.

Because the program aims to avoid unnecessary out-of-home placements for children, an additional indication of whether CFL meets its goals is to examine how many children in the study group remained with their families at the end of the study period. The proportion was very high — 417 of 423 children, or almost 99 percent. All five of the study group families that had children placed out of the home during the study period were continuing to receive CFL services.

Even the very full study conducted on the Preventive Program yields an incomplete account. But this study of operations and outcomes clearly reveals a program that carries out its work through rigorous adherence to key principles of a coherent philosophy and with creative, flexible social work practices. The program enables families to address a broad range of therapeutic, developmental, financial, health, recreational and other needs, and it adapts to help family members as their needs and circumstances change. The study also suggests that the program's effective approaches merit additional attention from professionals and others who wish to improve preventive services to families.

The Neighborhood Foster Care Program

Foster parents, recruited from the same neighborhood in which birth parents live, are chosen for their commitment to partner with CFL and the birth parents toward the goal of family reunification and strengthening the parent-child relationship, rather than the rescue of the child as the total purpose.

— **Sister Mary Paul**

In New York City, children often are placed in foster homes outside their neighborhoods. The opening of CFL's small neighborhood foster care program in 1988 culminated years of efforts by Sisters Mary Paul and Geraldine to create a program that would allow foster children to remain in Sunset Park while enabling foster care homes to function as CFL "satellites." According to Sister Mary Paul, the program aims to offset the trauma that "follows radical rupture of bonds with parents, relatives, school friends or other primary attachments."

To meet that goal, the program forges connections that strengthen the family. First, because of the neighborhood placement, children can visit their birth parents with relative ease. Second, foster parents are asked to establish a supportive friendship with birth families and, whenever possible, to continue positive relationships with those families after children are returned home. Third, foster parents can contact CFL for help in caring for children and relating to their families. Fourth, birth parents have easy access to CFL's Preventive Program. Finally, when children cannot be returned home safely, they sometimes can maintain connections to family members, friends and significant others in the neighborhood when Sunset Park foster families adopt them or keep them in long-term care.

At any one time, the program, which is managed by St. Christopher-Ottilie Children's Services, CFL's parent agency, typically has 10 to 15 foster families caring for about 25 children. (This number represents only a fraction of Sunset Park children in out-of-home care.)

During the eight years from the program's inception in 1988 through the end of the research study, the foster care program served a total of 136 children from 75 families. Researchers were unable to obtain definitive information on outcomes for most of these children. Only six children whom the researchers studied for the Preventive Program also had participated in the Neighborhood Foster Care Program. And neither CFL nor the research team had access to public child-welfare case data that might have revealed long-term outcomes for other children in the Neighborhood Foster Care Program, such as whether further abuse or neglect reports had been made for them or whether they had re-entered foster care.

One study yields indirect evidence of possible program accomplishments. Using New York City's child welfare data, child welfare expert Fred Wulczyn analyzed outcomes as of February 1994 for about 11,000 children admitted to the city's foster care system for the first time in 1990. Although he was unable to distinguish children in CFL's foster care program from Sunset Park children placed

COMMUNITY SCHOOL PROGRAM

"The third- and fourth-graders are making paper airplanes. Two staff members — the unit leader, a 19-year-old Hispanic woman and her 14-year-old counselor-in-training — monitor the group, helping with the project and keeping a degree of order needed to allow the children to work. At one point, a fight erupts ... centering on a girl who is frequently teased. The program director, who has been walking by, stops to reassure her and help her reflect on the incident."

— a researcher on the CFL Community School Program

"I came here and spoke with John [the Community School Program director at Public School 314]. It was close to the Aladdin show so he was really busy. He came and sat in the lunch room and spent a good hour with me having a long talk. ... He will listen and listen and in no way put you down. He'll respect you and respect you. He's like that with the children. And the children bring that home."

— a parent in the P.S. 314 program

elsewhere in the system, Wulczyn at least could analyze data by children's neighborhood of origin. Wulczyn concluded that, compared to children in New York City as a whole, Sunset Park children "do have a different experience" in foster care.* Only 13 percent of Sunset Park children remained in care after four years. By contrast, in neighborhoods with both lower and higher poverty rates, more than 30 percent of children remained in care at that point. Similarly, Sunset Park children were much more likely than other children to have been discharged from care after 12 months.

These findings suggest that something is helping Sunset Park foster care children achieve earlier and more frequent discharges than children in other New York City neighborhoods. While there is no certain connection between that outcome and CFL, the agency could be contributing to these patterns in two ways: first, by providing opportunities for foster families and birth families to work together, and second, by strengthening families of children placed elsewhere through other CFL services, including the Preventive Program.

Community School Program

Overview

During the 1995–96 school year, almost 2,500 children and young people took part in CFL's Community School Program, which provides services for Sunset Park's youth population. The programs operate in two of Sunset Park's five elementary

*Personal communication with Fred Wulczyn

schools — P.S. 1 and P.S. 314 — and in Dewey Middle School.[8] As shown in the sidebar on p. 24, the programs offer many different service options to children, teens and parents. For example, the programs based in elementary schools serve not only young children but also teens, in some cases calling on the adolescents to work with the younger children. But for all their diversity, the programs share a common starting point: CFL's interest in working with schools — institutions that have an influence on children but that often operate in isolation from the community — to engage children and young people with one another and with adults in normalizing and mutually enriching activities.

Profile: P.S. 314 Community School Program

Believing that the best way to understand the CFL Community School effort was to select one of the three programs for in-depth examination, researchers focused on P.S. 314. The major exception: For the Project Youth component, which operates many activities jointly for the two elementary schools, both P.S. 314 and P.S. 1 are covered.

P.S. 314 is a large, modern school with limited outdoor recreation space. Enrollment stood at 1,600 students at the time of the study — slightly over capacity. The student body, primarily Hispanic with a growing share of Chinese students, overwhelmingly comes from low-income families. Impressively, children at P.S. 314 generally perform at or slightly above the citywide average on standardized tests of reading and math skills.

COMMUNITY SCHOOL PROGRAM

"The performances [winter and spring musical performances in which all children in the Community Schools after-school programs participate] are attended by most of the children's families, as well as a number of other students, local residents, civic leaders and school officials. The two performances ... had packed houses with wildly enthusiastic audiences of 400 to 500 children, adults and elderly relatives. It was interesting to observe the high level of energy, excitement and interaction among the members of the audience, which was primarily Hispanic but also included significant representation from the Chinese community."

— a researcher's observations

"Oh my God."

"It would be boring."

"My mother wouldn't let me come outside. I'd start doing bad things."

"Before we started working here, we used to hang out until like three in the morning. The girls we hung out with, they got kids. I see them all the time."

— counselors-in-training (CITs) at the P.S. 314 Community School Program, responding to the question, "How would your life be different if you were no longer a CIT?"

[8] *Now called Middle School 116*

CFL's COMMUNITY SCHOOL PROGRAMS AT A GLANCE

P.S. 1 AND P.S. 314

- After-school child care
- Tutoring
- Summer day camp
- Teen Evening Centers
- Parent activities
- Counselors-in-training
- Project Youth

ALSO AT P.S. 314:

- New York City Beacon School
- Summer Youth Employment Program

DEWEY MIDDLE SCHOOL

- Creative arts and community service
- Arts and improvisational theater program
- Family Learning Center (academic supports)
- Community Service Program
- Parent Advisory Council

P.S. 314 was chosen for in-depth study among the three Community School programs — which the researchers found to be equally successful — because CFL was taking on a new role at P.S. 314 as a lead agency for a New York City-funded Beacon Schools program. Beacon Schools lead agencies are selected to establish, in collaboration with other community groups, year-round day and evening activities in targeted schools. P.S. 314's Beacon designation significantly expanded community-oriented programming at the school. Guided by CFL, agencies ranging from the Chinese American Planning Council to Brooklyn College to the Boy Scouts now offer Beacon activities such as English-as-a-Second-Language classes and basketball workshops to P.S. 314 students and parents. Although the entire Beacon Schools effort was a backdrop for the CFL study, the study and this summary are limited to Beacon activities administered directly by CFL.

Who Participates in What. There are a variety of ways to view participation in P.S. 314's Community School Program. First is CFL's figure for overall participation during a single school year. In 1995–96, slightly more than 1,000 children participated in CFL-administered Community School activities, although this figure most likely is low, because some recreational programs do not maintain regular attendance records.

Second, more specific information details 1995–96 enrollment in various program components, as shown in the box on p. 27. Of course, there

is overlap in these figures. For example, most children in the after-school program also enroll in summer camp. Also, the figures show cumulative participation for the year, not daily attendance. For instance, while the after-school program can handle 250 children a day, it routinely registers 270 children to allow for absences and served a total of 356 children over the course of the school year.

A third perspective on participation focuses on the ages, genders and ethnic backgrounds of children and youth enrolled in program components. During the 1995–96 school year, majority enrollment was divided almost evenly between children ages five to nine (39 percent) and young people ages 10 to 15 (42 percent), with the balance of participants being ages 16 to 21. At 61 percent, male enrollment was much higher than that of females, a difference explained almost entirely by different participation patterns in teen activities. (In many Hispanic families in the neighborhood, young women are expected to stay home in the evenings to help with child care and other chores.) As is the case for school enrollment as a whole, CFL program participation rates were highest among Hispanics (74 percent), followed by Asians (14 percent).

Community School activities are offered mainly on a first-come, first-served basis. Similarly, the program has no formal termination process. Young people may leave activities when they grow too old for them, move or find other interests. But budgetary, staff and space limitations create waiting lists for several program components. For example, at any one time, the after-school program has a waiting list of about 200 children.

Organization, Funding and Staffing. Adult staff for P.S. 314's Community School Program totals 18. The director, a professional social worker who has been with the program since 1983, is assisted by two additional social workers; three specialists in visual arts, performing arts and language arts; an assistant in preventive and parent support services; an office manager; and 10 after-school program unit leaders, several of whom also assume other roles as part-time security guards and aides in the Teen Center program. In addition, 15 paid youth assistants work with unit leaders and visual arts and performing arts specialists, and at any one time, between 40 and 50 volunteer counselors-in-training (an average of 70 annually) help with child care and children's activities. Most unit leaders and some assistant leaders are college students working part time. Many staff members live in the neighborhood, and many are bilingual Hispanics. One speaks Cantonese. Most paraprofessional staff members grew up in the neighborhood, and many once participated in CFL youth programs.

Clearly, the program has a complex staff makeup. Although the office manager was able to draw a relatively clear organizational chart for the program, the program director asserts that no hierarchical chart can convey the variety and flexibility of roles, responsibility sharing and networking that characterize the program's staff.

Inside the Program: Major Activities

After-School Child Care Program. This program, which provides free care for elementary school-age children from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. during the school year, is designed mainly to serve parents who work or attend school or job training. It also provides care for children referred by CFL preventive service workers who determine that the children need socialization and/or that their parents need respite time. (CFL also operates a six-week summer day camp that serves similar functions.)

At the beginning of the school year, each child is assigned to one of 10 units organized by age and, when age-appropriate, gender. Unit size averages 25 children, with units for younger children being smaller than those for older children. Each unit has a leader and one or more assistant leaders and/or counselors-in-training permanently assigned for the year.

In each unit, children participate in activities that cluster into five areas:

- performing arts (preparing for the twice-yearly musicals);
- reading;
- language arts (activities to enhance writing and reading skills through the use of imagination, arts and crafts, and games);
- art classes (preparing sets for stage performances); and
- homework help.

In addition, units offer informal play activity periods.

As indicated by the time allotted for preparation for the twice-yearly musicals, these events are important in shaping the program year. The performances, which engage children as well as many parents in the three after-school programs, are viewed as a way of helping children experience both pride in their accomplishments and a sense of communal participation. In conjunction with the performances, the P.S. 314 program holds two Community School fairs, a winter holiday fair and a spring street fair.

Parent Support and Involvement. Parent participation, viewed as critical to the success of the Community School Program, is encouraged in several ways. First, two parent coordinators engage parents and coordinate activities.

Second, because child care is free, all parents are expected to donate one hour each month to support the program. Contributions, which vary widely, include making costumes for a show; running a street fair activity; selling raffle tickets; and raising money for the Reading is Fundamental program, which purchases books inexpensively and distributes them free to children. As might be expected, a core group of parents participates more regularly than others; this core group expresses some resentment about less active parents.

Third, two groups collect parent input:

- a Parent Council, open to all parents, meets monthly to provide a forum for general input on the program (it generally breaks into subgroups for discussion in English, Spanish and Cantonese) and

- a volunteer Parents Executive Committee defines objectives for parental involvement and makes recommendations for meeting them.

Finally, the program sponsors a series of monthly parenting workshops on topics such as raising a child in two cultures. Sessions, usually provided in English, Spanish and Cantonese, are run by CFL staff, school personnel and outside speakers.

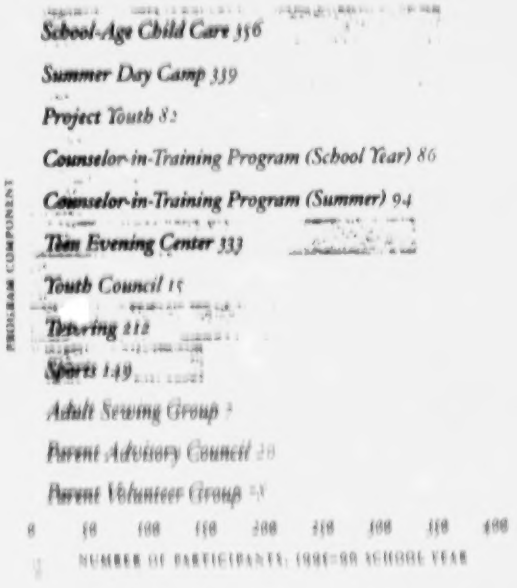
Encouraging active engagement of parents of teens is an ongoing challenge. For example, two years before the study began, after some fights had broken out among young people while leaving the Teen Center, CFL invited parents to attend meetings on teen violence or to volunteer as chaperones for a dance. These efforts, however, achieved relatively little success. Reflecting on this incident, the program director said: "Of course, parents are very busy, have much to do and all that. But ... as frightening as teens find their world, parents find it [equally] frightening ... and experience it as embarrassing or inappropriate to discuss it publicly."

The program director believes that for healthy development, young people need a community setting in which to socialize with older youths and adults. Yet the public school system has created a series of age-segregated institutions where youths must create their own subcultures. In contrast, the director frames the primary mission of the Community School project as integrating these subcultures with a range of role models and alternative developmental experiences. While this goal is not always realized, especially for young teens, researchers note that it remains a significant priority in the program.

The Counselor-in-Training Program. Administrators quickly found the initial vision for the Community School Program — a combination of after-school child care, the Teen Center and parent support — lacking ways to engage adolescents who were too old for the after-school activities but too young to be hired as staff or to take full advantage of the Teen Center. The Counselor-in-Training (CIT) Program was established to meet this need.

CITs, most of whom are (but are not required to be) graduates of the after-school program, must be 12 to 19 years old, willing to volunteer at least two afternoons each week, and sponsored and supervised by a senior staff member or unit leader. There is always a waiting list for the CIT program, a testament to its popularity. Some CITs later

PARTICIPATION IN COMPONENTS OF CFL's COMMUNITY SCHOOL PROGRAM



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Rapid Assessment Instrument

STUDY OF PROJECT YOUTH

Researchers administered two rapid-assessment instruments (the Hare Self-Esteem Scale* and the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale**) to teens in Project Youth and then calculated the difference in scores by subtracting the 1994 scores from the 1995 scores. The mean scores that 50 selected Project Youth participants obtained were compared to the mean scores of two age- and gender-matched samples — junior high school students who participated in an alternative intervention and children who did not receive any intervention at all. In all, researchers studied 150 children.

become unit leaders or assistants, who are hired on a merit basis.

CITs' principal responsibilities are to assist sponsors and help supervise children — for example, helping make props for a play or working with children to write a short story. All CITs must attend regular meetings on work issues and daily living problems and attend two annual weekend retreats at an upstate camp. Emphasizing teamwork, leadership, responsibility and bonding, the retreats also give many participants a rare chance to leave the city.

In addition to socializing and training opportunities, the program offers those who are income-eligible the advantage of guaranteed work through the Summer Youth Employment Program in the CFL summer camp program. Every youth who attends two days a week, has regular school attendance and earns passing grades receives $40 each semester and a certificate at a twice-yearly award ceremony.

Students also receive an important intangible benefit: ongoing contact with and role modeling from the staff. CITs are bombarded daily with praise, unconditional regard and opportunities to succeed. Socializing frequently with staff members whom they respect, CITs are made to feel part of a community that cares about them.

Project Youth. At one point, program managers noted that, while most CITs handled responsibilities well, a number were not as successful academically as they could be. This insight prompted the program to establish Project Youth at PS. 314 in 1992 and at PS. 1

*Hare, B.R. (1985). Hare Self-Esteem Scale. In *Measures for Clinical Practice: A Sourcebook*. K. Corcoran and J. Fischer, eds. New York: The Free Press, 195–96.

**Nowicki, S. and Strickland, B.R. (1973). A Locus of Control Scale for Children. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 40: 148–54.

the following year. Project Youth provides mentoring, tutoring, and family-life and sex education to CITs and other young people. During the 1995–96 school year, almost all CITs — 98 percent — were enrolled. Attendance averaged about 40 youths at each school.

Following intake interviews that gather background information, teens are assigned to one of four small groups that meet once a week to discuss family life and sex education. Discussion topics, which are determined by the groups, cover such issues as cultural differences, homosexuality, AIDS, youth violence and death in the family. Participants also are assigned to mentors, usually staff members with some college education. Mentors develop relationships and meet individually with each mentee at least twice a month to discuss progress, review report cards and talk about family or school problems. Mentors also refer mentees to tutoring when necessary. Although the mentor role is viewed as key to program success, participants also receive help from the more experienced project coordinators, who are professional social workers. Through their work in conducting intake interviews and running small-group discussions, project coordinators get to know participants well.

Response to Project Youth has been very positive; there is a waiting list for enrollment at the beginning of each year. However, as a relatively new program, it initially faced difficulties. For example, some of the older CITs resisted the program because they felt it might violate their privacy or remove their status as volunteers. Also, some who were successful in their child care roles resisted exposing parts of their lives in which they were vulnerable, such as low school achievement. An ongoing concern is the increased demand that the mentoring role places on program staff, many of whom already are overextended.

Still, coordinators report that Project Youth has enabled them to provide more support to CITs than was possible previously. Coordinators believe the program ultimately will contribute to better outcomes for teens. Available data confirm these impressions.

Rapid-assessment instruments were administered to Project Youth teens in 1994 and 1995, and the average scores of 50 selected Project Youth participants were compared to those of two groups of similar youths who either received a different intervention or no intervention at all. Project Youth participants obtained significantly lower average self-esteem scores than did other teens on the baseline 1994 administration of the scale, but by the second year of testing, Project Youth teens' scores equaled or exceeded the scores of others. In fact, the "grand" average self-esteem scores of Project Youth participants — a composite of their self-esteem outcomes including ratings by teachers, peers and parents — increased by 10 points, from 76 to 86, even as other teens lost points during this time. The assessments also showed that Project Youth participants felt significantly more in control of their lives than other teens did.

Perceptions of the Community School Program. Tapping into several sources of information on the Community School Program, researchers created a portrait of the program's reputation among children, youths, parents and staff.

In 1994, about 265 Sunset Park residents responded to CFL directors' request for letters to New York City's mayor focusing on a proposed drastic budget cut for youth services, which would have affected the Community School Program. Content analysis of letters from children and youths ranks the reasons they gave for liking the program and wanting it to continue. The most common reason was the help the program provides with homework and school. This assertion was followed closely by affirmations that the program "keeps kids off the streets" and is "fun." Also frequently cited were observations that the program helps children make friends, encourages performing art activities, is a "tradition," serves as a "second home" or "family," ensures safety, provides child care, teaches young people "how to perform on the job" and helps them develop confidence.

To elicit more information, researchers conducted four focus groups with CITs in spring 1994. Participants ranged in age from 13 to 15, and most had been CITs for one to three years. Some participants had been enrolled in the after-school program; others had made their first contact with CFL after learning of the program from friends and relatives who were CITs. A number pointed with some pride to the fact that they had been "picked" for the program.

The youths all spoke readily about their experiences. Many remarked on how much they had grown in the program. Several noted that, while they had found managing children to be difficult at first, they had learned over time:

> "It was horrible in the beginning, but I stayed. I just don't let it bother me anymore."
>
> "It's really nice now. You communicate. You tell them to do something, and they're listening. They're not giving you a hard time."

When asked to describe their responsibilities, CITs were clear about their primary obligations. For example, various teens responded similarly:

> "Help the kids. Keep them out of trouble."
>
> "Work with the kids. Talk to them if they got problems."
>
> "Teach them right from wrong. ... Be a role model."
>
> "Parents have to go to work, and they can't take care of the kids. So they leave them here, and they think the kids are safe. We're trying to keep kids safe, and that's a big responsibility."

CITs also described clearly their responsibilities to the larger program. Their comments indicate they have been socialized to understand how inappropriate behavior on their part could damage the pro-

gram, because they represent the program to the community:

> "I have to have a lot of self-control. No cursing. You have to come in at a certain time. You have to show them you're capable of this job, taking care of kids. You represent the program. You have to make a good impression."

Discussing what they liked about the program, teens noted that it allowed them to have experiences outside the home and kept them safe from potential problems such as drug use. Many expressed a sense of satisfaction at being respected by parents and children:

> "One of the good things is that kids look up to us. So do parents. Kids go home and brag about their CITs and counselors. It gives their parents a lot of trust in us."

> "You walk in the street and you see them, and they say hello to you. They have a smile on their faces. It's like you're doing something good. You feel part of something."

Asked to identify good and bad things about the program, CITs focused mainly on the positives outlined above. But they noted that they sometimes got overheated and tired in the program. Some said they found unit leaders difficult and had to transfer to different units. CITs also talked — with some enjoyment and at length — about some of the traditional rivalries between the groups at P.S. 314 and P.S. 1.

Researchers conducted two focus groups (one in English and one in Spanish) with parents. After the focus groups, when it proved difficult to get a sufficient number of parents to attend more meetings, researchers moved directly to a telephone survey to collect feedback.

The parents who attended the meetings had extensive experience with the program and were uniformly enthusiastic about it. They spoke readily about how their children benefited from participation. Some of the advantages they cited were:

- safe, secure child care;
- the range of activities available — for example, plays, visual arts and language skills activities;
- help with homework and academic skill building;
- development of social skills;
- opportunities for young people to talk out problems with adults and to connect with older or younger children;
- development of self-esteem through acquiring skills and receiving frequent praise and support from staff; and
- opportunities for young people to develop new friendships and become known in the community.

Parents also spoke readily about the benefits they themselves derived, especially the security they felt, knowing their children were in a safe place where everyone knew the youngsters by name. Although several parents said they would be willing to pay for

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this service if necessary, all agreed on the benefit of receiving this help for free.

Parents in the focus groups also confirmed the importance of volunteering in the program. Though it was difficult to find the time to participate, they felt the program tried hard to accommodate work schedules and use parents' various skills. "They recognize everybody ... and that's what I appreciate. It makes me want to do more," said one parent.

Another benefit was the sense of community that parents found in the program. Pointing around the circle, one commented: "It's good because my kids can get to know her kids, and her kids can get to know his kids. ... They know me. It all becomes a whole family." Finally, several parents highlighted the value of parenting workshops and individual help from the program director.

Only after extensive prodding did parents in the focus groups identify a small handful of drawbacks to the program. They cited the 3 p.m. closing time in the summer and the lack of resources for special-education students and children who want to be more challenged academically or physically.

Researchers polled a random sample of 139 parents whose children had attended the after-school program. Forty percent of interviews were in English, 32 percent were in Spanish, and 27 percent were in Cantonese. Most parents had one or two children who participated regularly. While almost one-third of parents had adolescent children, far fewer — slightly less than 14 percent — had teens who participated regularly at P.S. 314. Thirteen percent of respondents had children who had withdrawn from the program, usually because the child did not like the program or due to a specific family problem.

Interviews confirmed the comments of focus group participants, who stressed the program's importance to working parents. Parents appeared to value particular program components based partly on their cultural backgrounds, though most parents of all backgrounds cited help with homework as a benefit. More than half of parents who cited safety as a benefit were Cantonese-speaking, and 43 percent of those who emphasized the benefit of developing new skills were Spanish-speaking. The parents who commented on the program's positive environment were mostly English-speaking.

Slightly more than half of the sample said they had attended at least one parent program at the school, and many had attended more. About 21 percent of the Spanish- and English-speaking parents had participated in a formal parenting activity such as English-as-a-Second-Language classes, parenting workshops or the Parent Council. A slightly higher proportion — 30 percent — had attended informal events such as shows and street fairs. Spanish-speaking parents were most likely to help with these events, while Chinese parents were more likely to restrict involvement to parent meetings. The most common reasons parents gave for not participating were lack of time, scheduling problems and responsibilities for very young or disabled children.

In general, respondents expressed strong satisfaction with the after-school program. Almost half

said they would make no changes. Those who suggested changes were interested in increasing resources, expanding existing programs or requiring children to spend more time on homework. Four of the parents who had withdrawn their children, all Cantonese-speaking, did so because they were dissatisfied with the small amount of time devoted to homework.

The comments of parents surveyed, like those of focus group parents, tended to be very positive. These parents praised the program as a whole, praised specific activities or staff members, or cited specific benefits to children. Rare criticisms centered on security issues and concerns that training and supervision of teen participants were inadequate.

In all, the telephone survey and focus group research indicates that the Community School Program fills an important need in the diverse community that it serves. It allows parents not only to work but to feel secure about their children's safety — and provides the academic support and developmental opportunities they want for their children.

Researchers conducted intensive taped interviews with senior staff members of all Community Schools, as well as the director of the P.S. 314 program. They focused on respondents' concerns about and roles in the program, and on what contributes to its successes.

There were marked similarities in the ways staff members described the rationale for the program and its value to participants, indicating strong consensus on a service mission. Common themes included:

- helping parents with child care;
- giving children opportunities to socialize in a safe community atmosphere where they experience supportive relationships, adult authority and a feeling of "connectedness" over time;
- helping youths develop attachments to adults and peers of different ages;
- giving youngsters a sense of hope and purpose; and
- promoting academic learning and skill building.

Staff also cited concerns, including program instability due to cutbacks in funding for youth services, lack of resources to accomplish goals, and the current devaluing of service programs by many public officials. Several respondents mentioned difficulties in sharing space with school personnel, who would complain if anything were out of order; the limited success they had in engaging parents of adolescents; the knowledge that, despite their success, they did not engage large numbers of gang members and drug-involved youths in Sunset Park; and the overenrollment in and waiting lists for some programs. Several staff members also mentioned their tendency to become so overextended that they lacked time for adequate record keeping, staff meetings or long-term planning.

Observing the very low turnover rate among senior staff, researchers asked interview respondents what draws them to the work and sustains them. Several laughed and said it certainly was not the salary or the working hours — salaries are relatively low for people with the CFL staff's training,

experience and responsibilities, and the hours are long. The key motivators mentioned by all respondents were the strong relationships they shared with other program staff, the support they received from the CFL directors and the value they placed on the work.

Staff members listed an impressive number of characteristics that they valued about their work: the opportunity for creativity, a sense of autonomy, a wide variety of tasks, high standards for performance, the balance between short-term demands and long-term planning, the resilience of their clients, the sense of productivity and excitement they experience when youngsters feel connected and are recognized for accomplishments, being paid for work they find fun, the energy and synergy among staff administrators, and the pleasure that comes from being part of a developmental process.

Key Ingredients. Some of the key characteristics that emerged as critical to the success of the Community School Program are shared by the Preventive Program. These include:

- the holistic nature of services;
- the close coordination and integration of staff;
- the long-term involvement of staff and youngsters;
- the dynamic leadership of a program director;
- the strong common conviction about program mission; and
- the flexibility in adaptation to changing individual and community needs.

One other feature seems to contribute to the success of the Community School Program — the heavy emphasis on age integration and parental and community involvement as the only way to address the developmental needs of children and teenagers.

Practical Services: The Employment Services Program and the Storefront Center

Our casework supervisor, our community developer and I would meet weekly in our office [mainly to discuss] the casework, but we would always review what we were hearing that was presenting issues ... for clients who came in. ... What was happening at that time, what we were being flooded with at the front door, were people ... [whose] Food Stamps didn't arrive or whose welfare cases were closed. ... We began to think about ways in which we could make sure that everyone who came to the door had a chance to say what they wanted.

— Sister Geraldine, reflecting on the origins of the Storefront Center

In a sense, all CFL services are a mixture of developmental and more practical help. For example, the after-school program aims to promote positive growth in children and parents but also serves the more tangible function, deeply valued by program staff, of offering working parents a safe child-care option. Conversely, CFL's Employment Services Program is a practical service to help parents enter the labor market while at the same time building participants' confidence and self-esteem.

Despite this overlap, it is fair to say that the services covered above — counseling and preventive services and after-school and youth development programs — focus mainly on families' growth and development. In contrast, the services discussed in this section are oriented more toward meeting families' basic needs. As suggested by Sister Geraldine's recollections, in designing its overall program, CFL consistently has sought to ensure that the agency provides such practical help to the community.

Employment Services Program

We hear over and over from people who go to other programs that, when they talk about an issue that might become an obstacle for them to be placed [in a job], they say, 'No. We cannot work with you.' We look at it in a different way. If you're willing to put yourself through the process, if you allow us to work with you, then we'll work with you and hope that the end result is going to be a job. But if it is not, and you got something else out of it that is going to help you with your family, that's fine.

— CFL employment counselor

As noted above, it is unusual for a family service agency to sponsor an employment services program, but CFL moved in this direction when staff members repeatedly observed the negative, dispiriting effects of unemployment and underemployment on heads of households. These problems are especially acute in Sunset Park because of the high proportion of families headed by immigrants, a population that usually prefers immediate job placement to job training but faces formidable barriers due to limitations in language skills, education and work experience.

Designed to respond to those problems, the program offers clients pre-employment counseling, job readiness activities and job placement help in a way that leaves the door open to assisting with related family issues. The program operates with eight staff members, including the program coordinator and a full-time job developer.

Services are targeted to Sunset Park residents, but, in contrast to most CFL program components, they also are available to residents of other Brooklyn neighborhoods. The roughly 250 clients who use the program each year enter either on a drop-in basis or with more formal referrals. The program serves a disadvantaged clientele: Of enrollees during fiscal year 1996–97, 33 percent had limited English proficiency, 67 percent had lower than eighth-grade reading skills, and 33 percent were receiving public assistance.

MANY CLIENTS ARE PLACED IN JOBS AT SOME POINT DURING THE TWO-MONTH PERIOD ... AN IMPORTANT FEATURE OF THE PROGRAM IS THAT CLIENTS CAN RETURN FOR HELP IF INITIAL JOB PLACEMENT DOES NOT WORK OUT.

An initial assessment determines whether individuals are appropriate for the program, and some are referred instead to specialized skill training. Enrollees then attend a group orientation and testing session, where they also must present documentation of eligibility for employment in the United States.

Undocumented immigrants and those without green cards cannot enroll but are referred to immigration organizations for help with their immigration status.

After testing, most enrollees are encouraged to spend two months in the program, although some are placed in jobs more quickly. The first two weeks focus on workshops on job seeking, communication skills and other related topics. During that time, participants also work individually with a counselor, first on an in-depth assessment, then in almost daily counseling sessions. After the initial two weeks, most clients continue for about six more weeks, during which time they take part in English-as-a-Second-Language classes, computer literacy training and/or other individualized activities.

Many clients are placed in jobs at some point during the two-month period, but some take three to four months, and a few take as long as a year. An important feature of the program is that clients can — and frequently do — return for help if initial job placement does not work out.

Initially, the program received support from a variety of government funding sources, but in 1995 lost its funding base because New York City, following the policy direction of the federal Job Training Partnership Act, shifted emphasis to support only programs offering specific occupational skills training. For two reasons, CFL was unwilling to redesign its services to meet this mandate and instead switched to private funding: First, the program aimed to serve a wider range of community residents than do programs preparing participants for a single occupation. Second, experience suggested that a job is often the best preparation for employment, because clients gain more self-esteem and competency through work than through prolonged periods of training and welfare dependency. In recent years, especially with the advent of new federal welfare legislation, government officials and agencies increasingly have favored this "work first" approach. Sister Mary Paul observes that, unlike the CFL program, many current welfare-to-work efforts enroll job seekers in very large programs that rely on "quick-fix" strategies for job placement.

THE MISSION OF CFL's EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM IS BROADER THAN JOB PLACEMENT.

As suggested by the words of the counselor quoted at the start of this section, the mission of CFL's Employment Services Program is broader than job placement. Other goals cited by staff include "enhancing clients' sense of competency and self-worth" and "allowing clients to gain dignity, self-respect and self-esteem." Consistent with that vision, both the current and former program coordinators are bilingual professional social workers. The in-depth, individualized assessments, which cover a wide range of topics, including family situation, provide another sign of the program's holistic approach. Counselors spend extensive time helping clients work out family difficulties that might interfere with employment. For example, counselors refer some clients to CFL's Preventive Program or, if they live outside Sunset Park, to

other similar programs. Counselors also refer some clients to substance abuse counseling or assist them in arranging child care.

It is difficult to determine precisely how well the program connects clients to other needed services. Of course, some clients, even when asked whether they want other kinds of help, prefer to pursue only job issues. Most program participants appear not to be users of multiple CFL services, but a significant minority of families that took part in the program in 1994 and 1995 — one-third — availed themselves of additional CFL services.

These patterns provide evidence of the Employment Services Program's integration with other kinds of help. One possible limitation on this integration is the fact that some participants live outside Sunset Park and thus would be unlikely to turn to CFL for services that depend on location, such as child care. On the other hand, because Employment Services staff also can guide participants to non-CFL services, data on use of other services at CFL almost certainly underestimate the extent to which the program integrates employment with other forms of assistance.

While the program has multiple goals, job placement is a clear focus. Staff members cite three main challenges associated with job placement:

- helping dislocated workers who have been laid off after having worked in the same position for many years, who are losing unemployment benefits, who may be losing housing, and who lack the skills necessary to conduct a job search or move into a new area of work;
- assisting clients who have been on public assistance to deal with the potential loss of health care benefits if they go to work;[9] and
- identifying enough jobs in the community that are permanent, pay adequately, and are suitable for clients who have limited work and/or English language skills.

The program recently made two new efforts to address the last of these problems — first, creating a program advisory committee of potential employers and people with strong connections to the work world, and second, co-sponsoring a Community Job Fair with the local state senator.

The program aims to place about 15 clients in jobs each month, either as first or second placements. Researchers found it difficult to calculate the program's actual success rate in a single year because of open enrollment throughout the year, help that was extended to clients who may have enrolled in a previous year and the length of time often needed to secure an appropriate placement.

The best way to measure program success is to examine outcomes for all clients enrolled in a given fiscal year, while recognizing that the program may have helped some enrolled during that period to find jobs after the year ended. Of the 251 clients enrolled in fiscal year 1996–97, 63 percent were placed in full-time jobs, and an additional 10 percent were placed in part-time positions. The average hourly wage for full-time workers was $7.26, and the rate for part-time workers was only two cents

[9]The program helps former welfare recipients take advantage of transitional Medicaid benefits. Although most welfare recipients are eligible for this benefit for a year after they leave public assistance for work, many are not aware of its availability. Also, in recent years, a strong effort has been made to enroll participants' children in Child Health Plus, a program covering working-poor families ineligible for Medicaid.

less. Notably, almost one-third of those placed in full-time jobs had been on public assistance for an average of almost five years. For these workers, hourly pay averaged $7.48.

The Storefront Center

Those of us who were founders of the program are scavengers. We knew ... people in situations really needing winter clothes, furniture, whatever. ... During this same period, the community developer was collaborating closely with a colleague who was working on a hunger hot line and food emergencies, and she started saying, 'I think we have to figure out a way ... we can handle food emergencies.'

— Sister Geraldine

EACH SPONSORING AGENCY MUST MAKE A CONTRIBUTION IN AT LEAST ONE AREA OF WORK NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN THE PROGRAM, SUCH AS DONATING FOOD OR CONDUCTING FOOD DRIVES.

CFL has operated the Storefront Center since 1980. Now located near CFL's main offices, the center occupies one of five buildings on a block of well-maintained stores and offices. The location, which had been a site for drug dealing, was in poor condition when the Storefront Center moved there in 1989. But with CFL leading the way with its renovation of the building, a management corporation of nearby tenants and small business operators has revitalized the block.

In the front of the center, a narrow room displays racks of clothing, and at the very back is a storage area with shelves of nonperishable foods and large bins of rice and cereal. Between these two areas is a desk for the director of the Advocacy Clinic and coordinator of the Emergency Food Program. Thus, in a small storefront space, Sunset Park residents can find three sets of services — a thrift shop, an Advocacy Center and an Emergency Food Program (which is managed not by CFL alone, but by a coalition of community organizations that includes CFL).

The center director, a woman who has lived in the community for many years, holds primary responsibility for staffing the Advocacy Clinic and managing the thrift shop. A CFL social worker supervises her.

A full-time volunteer coordinates the food program. Part-time drivers and four volunteers, all neighborhood residents, round out the staff.

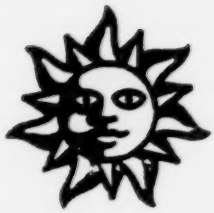
The ***Emergency Food Program***, which served 4,468 adults and 4,271 children in fiscal year 1996, accounted for more than two-thirds of referrals to the Storefront Center that year. Each of the program's sponsoring organizations is entitled to food vouchers to be used by their members or clients at the Storefront. The vouchers are intended to respond to emergencies, not chronic need. Participating agencies assess whether a person's situation fits that criterion. Perhaps not surprisingly, when agencies were asked to list the reasons why they referred clients to the program, the most frequent response over a one-year period was simply "insufficient funds."

In exchange for drawing on these resources, each sponsoring agency must make a contribution in at least one area of work necessary to maintain the program, such as donating food or conducting food drives. Additional limited support for the program comes from the government-funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the Emergency Food Assistance Program.

CFL's ***Thrift Shop*** was established not, like many others, primarily to raise money for a charity but to provide clothes, household goods, and children's books and toys in good condition at low cost to local families. Income from purchases at the shop totals only about $8,000 a year. The shop provides free and low-cost clothing to anyone with a letter from a recognized community organization specifying need.

CFL's ***Advocacy Clinic*** provides not only case advocacy but information and referral services to a wide range of community residents. Some clients are seen only once; others are regulars. Some hear about services by word-of-mouth, while others are referred from other CFL programs or neighborhood agencies. Originally designed to help with public benefits entitlements, the clinic has expanded over time as the director has been asked to assist with additional tasks, such as reading and translating governmental forms and filling out income tax returns. In fiscal year 1996, records show that the clinic responded to 990 individual problems, encompassing income taxes, public assistance, Medicaid, Food Stamps, Supplemental Security Income, Social Security, housing, the government-funded Heating Emergency Assistance Program, employment information and the need for a home attendant.

One of the director's primary tasks is to conduct prescreening for Medicaid, Food Stamps and public assistance programs. She also helps clients solve problems with the local welfare office and other bureaucracies. On occasion, she telephones the welfare office and speaks directly to the relevant caseworker to resolve difficulties. She finds that, because most problems can be cleared up on the telephone, she seldom has to accompany clients to an appointment. While she is prepared to speak on behalf of clients, she aims to prepare them to act on their own whenever possible. Thus, the clinic director coaches clients on how to handle their contacts in the welfare office and other agencies, teaching them to get the names of everyone to whom they speak and to keep copies of all documents. What gratifies her most about the program, the director says, is helping clients gain independence: "When I have a client come back and tell me, 'I made it. I'm on my own,' that makes me feel good."



CONCLUDING REMARKS

IV

Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts

This report began by noting that, while CFL is an exceptionally well-regarded agency, many of its observers and supporters have been eager to understand better how it functions and whether it makes a difference in the Sunset Park community. The Annie E. Casey Foundation responded to that interest by supporting the study on which this report is based. At the outset, there were questions about whether research could further understanding of CFL with any more power than anecdotal information. Many of CFL's qualities — its dynamism, flexible responses to families and diversity of services — suggested that researchers might find it difficult to pinpoint what the agency does or draw sound conclusions about the agency's capacity to contribute to Sunset Park families' well-being.

The analysis that emerged from the research is far from exhaustive. For example, while the substudy of the CFL Preventive Program provides statistical evidence of a benefit to children, additional research could deepen understanding of the relationship between program activities and changes in children. Unquestionably, the challenges involved in conducting a systematic study on an agency as complex as CFL should not be underestimated.

Despite these limitations, however, the study helps lay to rest doubts about the capacity of research to deepen understanding of multiservice family agencies such as CFL, which avoid prescriptive methods of serving parents and children. Moreover, the study's findings anchor the impressions about CFL that have emerged from reputation, anecdotes and other informal sources, thus increasing the confidence of policymakers and practitioners who endorse CFL as an exemplary agency.

Surveys, interviews, observations and statistical analyses yield a great deal of favorable information about CFL's various program components — its Preventive Program, its Neighborhood Foster Care Program, its Community School Program, its Employment Services Program and its Storefront Center. In reflecting on two of CFL's major work areas, the Preventive Program and the Community

School Program, researchers highlight characteristics of CFL practice that contribute significantly to successful work with children and families:

- the holistic nature of services;
- close coordination and integration of staff;
- long-term involvement of many staff members in the pertinent program component;
- dynamic leadership;
- a strong common conviction among staff members about program mission; and
- flexibility in adapting to changing individual and community needs.

The researchers also found an underlying coherence in CFL as an institution — not only a clear mission but a striking degree of consistency in the ways leaders, staff members and families interpret what the agency does. This important finding, together with the observation that each program is both an integrated part of the whole and contributes to the whole, leads researchers to conclude that CFL is "greater than the sum of its parts." Such institutional coherence should be one touchstone for scholars, policymakers and practitioners in their continuing assessments of community-based family service agencies.

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